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Senator Sikkema Calls for Leadership Meeting on Detroit Public Schools Issue

*Senate prepared to act but is concerned about lack of deficit reduction plan
and required audit*

Lansing - Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema today called for a meeting with Gov. Jennifer Granholm, State Schools Superintendent Tom Watkins, Detroit Public Schools CEO Ken Burnley and House Speaker Rick Johnson concerning the financial situation with the city's schools.

"There is a serious problem here that needs to be addressed and all I've seen so far is smoke and mirrors," said Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "It's time for some tough decisions to be made at many levels. The Senate is prepared to act, but the prudent thing is for the Legislature, the governor and the school district to act together."

Sikkema noted that the Detroit Public Schools are in violation of state law because they have failed to turn in an annual audit, which was due Nov. 15. In so doing, the district has put at risk its monthly school aid payment, the next one of which is scheduled for Dec. 20. Adding insult to injury, the district let its financial situation become dire before going public and asking the Legislature to bail them out.

"The Detroit Public Schools have not submitted the audit required by law and they have not submitted a deficit reduction plan," Sikkema said. "What the district has done is reported a \$198 million deficit and asked for permission to borrow money to cover it while coming up with a deficit reduction plan later. The concept of allowing a school district to go into debt to pay off a deficit when a deficit reduction plan has not been agreed upon is unacceptable."

According to state law, the state school superintendent is responsible for ensuring the financial solvency of all public school districts in Michigan. Sikkema said he doesn't want to hear any more talk of how to give the Detroit schools more money until he sees a deficit reduction plan and some tough choices on spending being made.

"The district told us they want to borrow money now and make tough decisions later, but that is not acceptable," Sikkema said. "You don't start this conversation talking about how much more money to throw at the problem. It's time for some tough questions and even tougher answers."

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